

Senate Education Committee

October 22, 2014

Testimony re SB 1075

My name is Judith Kovach and I represent *Genocide and Holocaust Education Now!*, a collaboration of individuals and organizations who recognize and support the need for educating Michigan students about genocide, including the Holocaust.

The mission of *Genocide and Holocaust Education Now!* is to have legislation enacted in Michigan that ensures that all students in public schools are educated about genocide and the Holocaust, to make sure that the vital lessons of these events help them become compassionate, responsible and responsive citizens. It is only by educating future generations that we can prevent such atrocities from happening again.

Florida, New York, New Jersey, California, Illinois and Pennsylvania have laws that require public school curricula to include teaching about genocide and the Holocaust.

An additional 10 states recommend that genocide and the holocaust be taught in public schools and 14 states have established commissions. Michigan law is silent on the teaching on genocide and the holocaust.

Boards of Education in 48 states, including MI, set standards for the teaching of social studies; 24 of these are explicit that social studies address the Holocaust. Again, Michigan is silent.

A 2014 research study indicates that many young adults were taught at least a little bit about the Holocaust in public school in Michigan. Many know who Hitler was and know that Jews and others were killed but this is not what Holocaust and genocide education is about. Less than a third of the young people knew what the Final Solution was or learned about the German people's support of Hitler. Michigan's future citizens need to understand not just the historical facts, but must learn the consequences of millions of people standing by silently and watching the systematic killing and dehumanization of people simply because of their religion, race or other characteristic.

We all know that millions of people have been killed in wars. Students must be taught about the differences between war and genocide or they will miss an irreplaceable opportunity for learning about social responsibility and moral development. The atrocities of genocide continue to occur in the world our young people are inheriting. Currently, in Michigan, four of five of the young adults in our sample reported that they were taught little or nothing about other genocides, including those occurring today. One of the universal lessons of the Holocaust is that national, ethnic, racial, or religious hatred can overtake any nation or society

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ("Why Teach About the Holocaust," 2013), "The holocaust was a defining historical moment. Examining this history can heighten the awareness of the danger of genocide in the contemporary world and bring to the fore an appreciation for individual rights and universal values."

Given the fact that genocide, mass atrocities and human rights violations are historical and contemporary realities in the twenty-first century, a careful study of the Holocaust and other genocides will lead to a sharper understanding of the political, economic, social and moral ramifications of the many faces of prejudice.

Perhaps, it was not an accident that the genocide and Holocaust bill hearing in the House was held on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The new year is not only a time of renewal but begins a 10 day period of reflection about the past and requires that we pledge to do better going forward. In fact, all religions require this. In the spirit of this season of reflection and commitment to change, I urge you to make the education of Michigan's children better and take one step towards raising genocide awareness by supporting this bill

Thank you.